3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
NO6 Comanche NO6

161 the entire tribe must have been between 15,000 and 20,000 in the eighteen thirties. This would be in accordance with Mooney's estimate of 19,200 for the period 1841–45 and Neighbors' *Report* of 1849 which places the population at 20,000, with 4,000 warriors as "a careful estimate." A more conservative estimate made by Charles Bent, who was well informed, placed the number of lodges at 2,500, or 12,000 people, in 1846. This would approximate W. B. Parker's 1854 calculation of 20,000 for both the Comanches and Kiowas.[30] Twenty thousand is the population of only a small-sized city in America today. But a rough, tough, roving tribe of warrior-plunderers who with their women and children numbered 20,000 on the Southwestern Plains a hundred years ago was then a formidable group.

161 It could be that all the early estimates were somewhat high in the light of later knowledge of the Comanches, but they may not be 165 unduly so, for all evidence substantiates the conclusion that the population was declining rapidly in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. A low birth rate, disease, and constant warfare on all sides were cutting down "The People." The decline continued until after the turn of the century. In 1866 the Comanches were estimated at 4,700.[31] By 1884 the population had dwindled to a pitiful 1,382,[32] and in 1910 there were only 1,171 survivors. By comparison, the total population in 1910 for all Plains Indians was estimated at 50,208 by Clark Wissler, and he doubts that their combined population at any time ever exceeded 100,000.[33]

[30] Charles Bent to Hon. Wm. Medill, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 10, 1846 (from Santa Fé), Abel, *The Official Correspondence of James S. Calhoun*, 6–9; Parker, *op. cit.*, 231.

[31] Charles Bogy and W. B. Irwin, special agents, to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 21, 1866 (National Archives, Treaties, Talks, and Councils file, Office of Indian Affairs, Washington).

[32] Agent P. B. Hunt, *Annual Report*, 1884, 79.

[33] Wissler, *North American Indians of the Plains*, 44, 48.

21: Burnet T-5 (1818-1819) 1954 NO6 Comanche NO6
Texas

[ca. 1818]

the Indian character. The Comanchees manifest their sensibilities by mourning vehemently for the dead. They continue their lamentations stately, morning and evening, for a length of time proportioned to the affinity and the consequence of the deceased. The women shave their heads and scarify themselves with knives or sharp flints, until they are literally covered with blood. Whether they have derived this practice from the discomfited prophets of Baal, (I Kings 18, 28) is for learned antiquarians to determine. The men set too much value on the velvet softness of their tawny skins, to have them scarred and serrated by so unprofitable a custom; but they will sometimes shave their heads, which is also considered a grievous retrenchment of masculine beauty. At each periodical lament, the bereaved relations assemble unitedly to bewail their departed friend. Tears are shed in copious profusion, accompanied by loud and plaintive strains of hideous dissonance, not unlike the howlings of ravening wolves. The goods and chattels of the deceased, including his tent and all its apparatus, are sometimes burnt; and such of his horses and mules as the avarice of the living will relinquish, are killed in order to be transferred to the hunting grounds of Elysium, for the future benefit and behoof of the dead. It was estimated by eye-witnesses, that during the prevalence of the small-pox among them in 1819, when they were swept off, as with the besom of destruction, there were not less than 5000 of these valuable animals immolated in this manner. The mode of conducting their funeral obsequies, I have never witnessed, and believe they sedulously avoid the observation of strangers of these occasions.

[Note. The length of this letter compels us to divide it. The rest will appear next week.]

[*The Cincinnati Literary Gazette*, June 12, 1824]

Letter IV.

[Concluded]

Vanity, certainly, is not peculiar to the Comanchees, but they possess more vanity both national and personal,

21: Burnet T-5 (1818-1819) 1954 NO6 Comanche NO6
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175 [ca-1918]
262 imagine, these beef chips are neither very palatable nor alimental after this operation; but they are still meat, and
175 meat is always desirable to a carniverous savage. The bene-
317 ficient author of nature has given them an inexhaustible supply of salt. They procure this excellent fossil from a saline near the sources of the Rio Brazos, where it is indurated by natural evaporation, into masses of different dimensions. When pulverized, it is of a beautiful whiteness, not
175 inferior to our best table salt. But owing to their roving
263 habits, the Indians are frequently destitute of this healthful and savoury ingredient in animal food, and eat their meat for months together without seasoning of any kind. They do not consider this privation as a very serious matter.

175 They make a kind of bread of the pods of the locust
262 tree, which grows abundantly throughout their range. These pods possess a small portion of sacchrine matter which renders the meal cohesive and gives it an agreeable though somewhat insipid taste; but in substance it is about as edible as saw-dust, which it resembles in appearance. The Peccan tree grows luxuriantly on all their water courses, and the delightful nut it affords, together with black and red hawes, prickly-pear apples, and some other spontaneous fruits, and a few excellent roots, eke out the scanty subsistence of these people, during the absence of their favorite Buffaloes.

175 Some of the lower or southern villages make an annual
22 visit to the Whacoes (a small tribe located on the Brazos)
[439] and traffic horses for beans, melons, and corn. But owing to
[261] their frequent migrations, they are not able to transport a permanent stock of these articles; and very soon after returning from the corn feast of their more provident neighbours, they relapse into their habitual alternations of feast or famine.

175 But Providence seems to have provided them with some
165 natural indemnities against the physical evils that might be
[164] supposed incidental to their irregular and versatile manner of life. Notwithstanding their frequent and painful privations, they are subject to few diseases, and exhibit many instances of remarkable longevity. Men, whose furrowed

21: Burnet T-5 (1818-1819) 1954 NO6 Comanche NO.
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Men, whose furrowed [ca. 1818] cheeks and blanched locks palpably indicate what we would call an extreme old age, and who by their own traditionary accounts, have felt the frosts of an hundred winters, will not relinquish the sports of their youth, the hunting of Buffaloes on horseback. The almost unqualified salubrity of the climate they occupy, certainly has a large share in this unusual prolongation of life and activity. Their being altogether debarred, by local remoteness from civilization, from the use of spirituous liquors, is another prominent reason of their healthful condition. How happy would it be, for the abused and degraded aborigines of our country, had they all been equally secluded from access to that baleful poison of the moral and physical man. Their intercourse with their more refined and cultivated neighbors, might in that case have been productive of many benefits to this hapless race, whereas it has been replete with disaster.

B.

[*The Cincinnati Literary Gazette*, July 3, 1824]

A brief desultory and imperfect vocabulary of the Comanche language; respectfully dedicated to Professor Rafinesque of Transylvania University [Lexington, Ky.]

Too-he-whistee—Man
Whiep—Woman
App—Father
Pe a—Mother
Too-a—Son
Pate—Daughter
Ta-que-ne-whap—Chief captain
Pe ee sheamp—Private soldier
Tav-e-vo—Spaniard
Carno—American
Inkernish—English
Pavom-pete—White man
Tu-he-wheete—Red or color'd men
Hanche—Friend
Hanche-ka-a—Enemy
Taa-ve—Sun
Mu-ur—Moon
So-co-vete—The Earth
Tasheno—Stars
Kar-me-ad-tasheno—North or not moving star
Tucan—Night
Ta-bane—Day
Oot-sa-inte—Winter or cold
Urra-inte—Summer or warm

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

simply as the department heads had imagined, the department and Chief Parker arrived at this sensible solution:

Nothing would be done about men who already had more than one wife, but they were not to take any more wives. Even if one died, a man would have to get along on what wives he had left. All single men would be restricted to marrying one wife. A violation of any one of these restrictions would bring about prosecution under the white man's law.

Among the Indians I knew intimately enough to be familiar with their family lives, I knew of only one who violated this agreement. He was a compulsive drinker, and was about to starve the two-wife family he already had when he took on a third wife. Ultimately he had to move onto the reservation permanently so as to get food, and I lost track of him. His Indian neighbors seemed to be ashamed of his conduct and tried to ignore his existence.

Polygamy had been an economic and social necessity for the Comanches. From the time they entered written history, when they came into contact with the Spanish people of Santa Fe about 1700, until their surrender in 1878 at Fort Sill, their history was one of continuous warfare. They had fought and defeated the Pawnees, the Osages, the Tonkawas, the Navahoes, the Utes, and the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico and Arizona. They had established an inland empire, Comancheria, just as legitimately as Charlemagne established his, and for a time they rode the crest of the horse-buffalo culture. They marketed horses with the Canadian Indians, raided as much as 1,500 miles into Mexico, and had seen the Pacific Ocean. They had stopped the advance of Spain to the north and to the east and that of the French to the west and to the south. Then, in the years of the new kind of warfare which brought about their decline, the United States, the Republic of Texas, the Confederacy, and Mexico were among their enemies. During all this time there was no period when the tribe as a whole was at peace.

In war men die young, and the male-female balance is lost. Continual warfare brought about an erosion of the numbers of Comanche men out of all proportion to the natural losses, through death, of the women. It was only through the custom of polygamy that every woman could have a husband and the birthrate could be maintained.

Then too, there had to be many trained hands to keep a Comanche

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
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a wife, the other three having died from overwork. Neither would he tolerate a slave woman to help his wife.

According to Comanche custom, if you buy a wife and if for any reason she is unsatisfactory, if she runs away, or if she dies, you may go to the wife's father and demand the purchase price back, or another wife if there is still an unmarried daughter.

Concerning Mo-cho-rook's cruelty, it was said that he never took a prisoner. He killed all, as he came to them: warriors, women, old men, children, babies; and he took no prisoners. My memory is too faulty to give the number of scalps he was supposed to still have. One thing seemed pretty authentic. He was supposed to have a full-length lariat (approximately thirty-three feet) that he had plaited from women's hair—Mexican, Indian, and white.

I was never able to learn whether plaiting was an American Indian-developed art, or if it was learned from the Spanish. Many of the old fellows plaited excellent round rawhide ropes, and also many of them were quite proud of their horsehair lariats. Mo-cho-rook was the one and only man who was supposed to have one plaited from women's hair.

His death on October 4, 1915, at the age of eighty-nine, was slightly on the prosaic side. At least he died in bed. But he saw fit to lend a dramatic touch. He had sustained a broken hip while working with his horses. They brought a doctor out from Lawton, when he refused to go to the Indian hospital. The doctor put him in a cast, but when the doctor came back in a few days, he found that the old chap had made his wife cut the cast off. She had brought him dogwood switches from the creek, and he had plaited himself a wicker cast to hold his leg and hip. He lived only a short time.

As to his age, here is all we have to go by. The Comanche roll was made up soon after the surrender in 1875. At that time he was arbitrarily given the birth year of 1828. That means that they judged him to be fifty years old. It is extremely unlikely that even then any of the warriors who were on the raid when he was kidnapped from Mexico were alive. A little arithmetic will show that they would have been at least seventy years old. That is just older than Indians became at that time, under the conditions they lived in.

Another bit of arithmetic brings some interesting conclusions. Supposing that Mo-Cho-rook's birth year is approximately correct, that means he would have been an active warrior by the year 1844. That

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
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after all, a twelve-year-old Indian boy has only a twelve-year-old Indian boy's head.

My personal feeling is—and I believe anyone who lived around the plains Indians at the turn of the century will agree—that the greatest miracle performed that afternoon was calling the Martny wives back from the hypnotic state of the death wail. This is a deliberate, self-induced mental condition; and when the women have been in it for a sufficient time, they become impervious to pain. They slash their breasts, bodies, and legs; and if the state continues long enough —say into the third day—it is climaxed by their whittling off a finger with their butcher knife. Generally it is the forefinger of the left hand. Women in this thralldom seem to have a high coagulatory content in their blood. Evidence of women's bleeding to death from self-inflicted wounds, when in this hypnotic state, is nil.

Possibly this blood property is a result of the women's heavy meat diet, or it may be a chemical change in the blood brought on by the severe hysterical state under which they are laboring. One thing old plainsmen are agreed on: Indian women are extremely dangerous when in the wail, and even their own menfolks give them a wide berth.

Because this state is deliberate and self-imposed, they resent being called back to normalcy. It is entered into to escape a sorrow—something they cannot face in their normal state. Perhaps their minds become as blank to sorrow as their bodies do to pain. In a way it is the kind of thinking a drinker uses, when he stultifies his senses with liquor to forget his inadequacy. Of this I am sure—I could never myself have the courage to call three wailing Comanche women back to sanity.

I think of three things happening that day that we can properly label phenomena. First is the dragging of this boy by a frantic horse, through the brush and timber of West Cache, for more than two hours, without the horse's ever once kicking or stepping directly on Albert's head or rib cage. The Bone-setter must have diagnosed these facts, and Dr. McLain must have overlooked them.

Phenomenon number two is a strange cowboy's riding through the country, chancing upon this isolated camp, and seeking food at that exact time. Number three is, of course, that this particular stray cowboy had the courage and willingness to take on a job shunned by a trained, educated doctor, and the skill to turn out a workmanlike job.

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131 In 1719 the Comanche are mentioned under their Siouan name of Padouca as living in what now is w. Kansas. It must be remembered that from 500 to 800 m. was an ordinary range for a prairie tribe and that the Comanche were equally at home on the Platte and in the Bolson de Mapimi of Chihuahua. As late as 1805 the North Platte was still known as

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COMANCHE WOMAN

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131 Padouca fork. At that time they roamed over the country about the heads of the Arkansas, Red, Trinity, and Brazos rs., in Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. For nearly 2 centuries they were at
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648 war with the Spaniards of Mexico and extended their raids far down into Durango. They were friendly to the Americans generally, but became bitter enemies of the Texans, by whom they were dispossessed of their best hunting grounds, and carried on a relentless war against them for nearly 40 years. They have been close confederates of the Kiowa
648 since about 1795. In 1835 they made
657 their first treaty with the Government,
131 and by the treaty of Medicine Lodge in 1867 agreed to go on their assigned reservation between Washita and Red rs., s. w. Okla.; but it was not until after the last outbreak of the southern prairie tribes in 1874–75 that they and
161 their allies, the Kiowa and Apache, finally settled on it. They were probably never a large tribe, although supposed to be populous on account of their wide range.
[165] Within the last 50 years they have been terribly wasted by war and disease. They numbered 1,400 in 1904, attached to the Kiowa agency, Okla.

[p. 327-B]